

## BOOK REVIEW

DAVID SMALL AND ELLA MAY T. WULFF. 2008. **Gardening with Hardy Heathers**. (ISBN 13: 9780881927825, hbk.). Timber Press, Inc., The Haseltine Building, 133 S.W. Second Avenue, Suite 450, Portland, Oregon 97204-3527, U.S.A. (**Orders:** www.timberpress.com, 800-327-5680). \$39.95, 296 pp., 1 line drawing, 214 color photos, 17 maps, 2 charts, 7"× 10".

The authors ask the question, "Why Grow Heathers?" in the opening chapter. The answer is convincingly supplied in following chapters. The reader is drawn into the fascinating and diverse world of the large group of plants collectively called heathers. Heathers occupy several genera, including *Calluna*, *Erica*, *Daboecia*, and *Andromeda*.

This book offers extensive information on care and cultivation of heathers, as well as propagation methods, guidance on designing a heather garden, and uses of companion plants. The authors share their knowledge of the popularity of heather breeding while clarifying the muddy waters of heather nomenclature.

Many of the heathers originated in the Northern Hemisphere. Their preferred climate is temperate with annual rainfall over 40 inches. Many types are found at altitudes over 1,000 feet in elevation and in alpine environments. Because heathers thrive in areas with poor soils, near coastal regions, in windy locations, and in boggy soils they are one of the most adaptable groups of plants, useful in a wide variety of garden applications. Heathers are most readily associated with two types of ecosystems: the heaths and moorlands in Western Europe. Here they grow mixed with grasses, forbs, other shrubs, and occasionally trees to create essential habitat for many animals, especially birds.

Humans have also found many uses for heathers: as material for making rope, baskets, brooms, bedding, fences, animal fodder, as well as ingredients in traditional medicines and dyes. One of the first uses of heather was as a fuel source. These plants have also been used for building material, primarily as the source of thatch for roofing. However, sod houses (called turves in Scandinavia) were widely constructed from heathers. Our modern word "turf" is derived from "turve."

Care and cultivation of heathers are discussed in detail. While heathers are found in harsh and marginal environments, the perception that they require no special care when cultivated is erroneous. Heathers can be successfully grown in hot summer climates if afternoon shade is provided. Likewise, they require winter protection when grown in zones colder than their rated tolerance. Proper soil conditions are also essential for growing heathers. A soil that is acidic, high in organic matter, well draining yet moisture retentive is desirable. Heathers cannot survive if planted in clay.

The authors describe pruning as the least understood aspect of heather culture. These plants benefit from annual pruning that removes spent flower stems. Pests that harm heathers are also discussed. Rabbits, hares, and other rodents can cause damage, though heathers are not preferred by deer. Other pests include the heather beetle, red spider mite, vine weevil, and parasitic nematodes.

In the design discussion, careful planning for site preparation is emphasized. Many heather-themed gardens strive to express a natural or informal effect, but heathers are well suited to frequent pruning, so they are also used in formal knot gardens. While heathers are generally thought of as low-growing shrubs or ground covers, the authors provide information on taller varieties (tree heaths) which can add height to garden plantings.

The book includes photographs and maps of species ranges. Methods for production of cut flowers and techniques for drying heathers are described. The last chapter, "Heathers for Special Uses" is an excellent reference for growers, providing lists of heathers with similar traits and care needs.

—Jackie Peel, Volunteer,

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